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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this booklet is to clarify what can be taught about religion in public schools while remaining within constitutional guidelines and using teaching material that is pedagogically sound. The first section, "Religion is a Fact of Life," covers the historical background, the current situation, and issues to resolve in teaching about religion. "Preparing to Teach about Religion" deals with the place of religion in the curriculum, teacher preparation, and resources. "The Bible in Literature Classes," discusses approaches to using the Bible and some classroom problems. The next section, "Teaching About Religion in the Social Studies," covers guidelines for this area, a sample lesson, and curriculum resources. "Community Relations and Teaching about Religion" deals with the controversies surrounding this topic, involvement of the community in developing policy guidelines, implementation of such guidelines, and resources. Two pages of additional references are also provided. (IS)

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Teaching About Religion in the Public Schools

Charles R. Kniker

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Writing this fastback involved the collaboration of several individuals who have made distinguished contributions to the field of religious studies in the schools.

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Teaching About Religion in the Public Schools

by
Charles R. Kniker

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Introduction

At the urging of conservatives, President Ronald Reagan declared 1983 the "Year of the Bible." Among other outcomes, its advocates hoped the proclamation would promote Bible study and voluntary prayer in public schools. Ironically, 1983 was also the 20th anniversary of the *Schempp/Murray* decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court, in which the justices ruled that devotional use of sacred scriptures was unconstitutional in public schools, but went on to identify (some would say even prescribed) three areas in which teaching about religion would be legally acceptable.

The rhetoric about mixing religion and education in 1983 intensified in 1984 during the presidential campaign. Advocates of school prayer were heard at school board meetings, statehouse hearings, in Congress, and on television. Seemingly, the voices that shouted the loudest either misunderstood or were deliberately ignoring the 1963 Supreme Court decisions, as well as the 1962 *Engel* v. *Vitale* decision, which ruled that state-prescribed prayer in the public schools was unconstitutional.

With all the recent attention to "returning" religion to public schools (it was never outlawed), there is a widespread feeling that religion can not be discussed in public schools. One college professor reported receiving a phone call from a frenzied librarian wanting to know how to dispose of a Bible discovered in the school's resource center! In the minds of many, including educators, God has become an academic dropout, the Bible a taboo textbook, private prayers in school cafeterias an illegal act. Others are convinced there is a worldwide conspiracy to infuse the school curriculum with secular humanism.

The purpose of this fastback is to dispel the notion that teaching about religion in the public schools is illegal. To do this, we shall first clarify what can be done that meets constitutionally appropriate tests and that is pedagogically sound. We shall focus only on teaching *about* religion, not on religious practices or moral/values education. They are related but distinctive from religious studies. Furthermore, the section on using the Bible in literature classes is concerned with teaching literature and is only tangentially related to teaching *about* religion.

Examples from two curriculum areas — literature and social studies — will illustrate materials and methods that interested teachers can use. Finally, because religious issues in the school can generate intense community reactions, we include a section on how school districts can develop appropriate policies for dealing with religion in the school.

The assumptions guiding the writing of this fastback are: 1) religion can be a vibrant part of the curriculum; 2) individual teachers should be given as much freedom as possible to decide whether and how they will treat the subject (consistent with the policies of the school board); and 3) the increasing pluralism of the nation will require teachers to know more about other cultures, including their religious heritages.

Religion Is a Fact of Life

Many people think that the establishment clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, commonly referred to as separation of church and state, prohibits teaching about religion in public schools. They think that since the Supreme Court in 1963 banned school-sponsored morning devotions – Bible reading, prayer, hymns – therefore teachers have no business discussing religion or the Bible.

Actually, the opposite is true. Not only did the Supreme Court say it was legal to teach about religions and to study the Bible, it went even further. The justices urged that such practices were necessary. Consider some of their statements:

Justice Tom Clark, for the Court

> It might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or of the history of religion and its relation to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here [*Schempp/Murray* decisions, 1963] indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment.

Justice William Brennan, concurring opinion

> The holding of the Court today plainly does not foreclose teaching *about* the Holy Scriptures or about the differences between religious sects in classes in literature or history. Indeed, whether or not the Bible is involved, it would be impossible to teach meaningfully many subjects in the

social sciences or the humanities without some mention of religion. To what extent, and at what points in the curriculum, religious materials should be cited are matters which the courts ought to entrust very largely to the experienced officials who superintend our Nation's public schools. They are the experts in such matters, and we are not.

Justice Arthur Golberg, concurring opinion

Government must inevitably take cognizance of the existence of religion, and, indeed, under certain circumstances the First Amendment may require that it do so. And it seems clear to me . . . that the Court would recognize the propriety of . . . teaching *about* religion, as distinguished from the teaching *of* religion in the public schools.

Justice Robert Jackson, concurring opinion in McCollum, 1948

Certainly a course in English literature that omitted the Bible and other powerful uses of our mother tongue for religious ends would be pretty barren. And I would suppose it is a proper, if not indispensable, part of preparation for a worldly life to know the roles that religion and religions have played in the tragic story of mankind. The fact is that, for good or for ill, nearly everything in our culture worth transmitting, everything which gives meaning to life, is saturated with religious influences. . . . One can hardly respect a system of education that would leave the student wholly ignorant of the currents of religious thought that move the world society for a part in which he is being prepared.

Keeping the justices' statements in mind, teachers must remember that teaching about religions in public schools is different from teaching religion. Teaching about religions in public schools is also different from teaching moral values. Not everyone understands these distinctions. Not everyone wants to understand these distinctions. Failure to understand and accept such distinctions accounts for most of the confusion and reluctance to discuss religion or the Bible in public schools.

Historical Background

It is important to have some historical perspective before dealing with the controversial questions that have arisen for today's public schools. It is easy to forget that formal instruction in America from the 1600s to the early 1800s most often was conducted in private schools, which were founded by religious groups and had a curriculum rooted in the Bible and denominational doctrines. By the 1700s, however,

America's earlier homogeneous communities, from New England to Georgia, were changing, with populations becoming increasingly diverse in politics, economics, and religion.

After the Revolutionary War, some of the country's leaders recognized that one function of the education system in a fledgling nation was to build national unity. The "common" schools called for by Horace Mann of Massachusetts and Henry Barnard of Connecticut wanted to produce loyal citizens who would be active participants in the great experiment in democracy. Blinded by their Protestant bias, however, they believed that certain types of moral instruction and Bible readings were acceptable. Nevertheless, several of Mann's annual reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education mentioned that sectarian teaching could not be allowed because it would be too divisive.

The assumption that one moral culture existed in America was exploded as early as the 1840s, with a court case over the use of public monies for Catholic schools in New York, and with bloody riots in Philadelphia and Cincinnati, where Catholics objected to reading the King James Version of the Bible in public schools. By the 1890s, a number of court cases in the Midwest over Bible reading were further indications of the growing diversity of the country. Most sought to end Bible reading in public schools because it too often reflected a Protestant perspective. Even before the onset of the 20th century, the pages of the U.S. Commissioner of Education's reports were filled with articles and letters from administrators and teachers advocating less use of the Bible for religious instruction. As an alternative, writers suggested that the Bible could be used for gentle moral guidance or, better yet, as a treasure trove of various types of literary masterpieces.

The growing discomfort over the alliance of religion and education probably has not affected most communities or schools until recent years. There are many reasons why public school teachers have been teaching about religion or, more likely, teaching religion ever since the "common school" first appeared in the 1830s and 1840s. Small, homogeneous communities expected it. Literature and history textbooks often were written by clergy who interpreted life from a theological perspective. Also the art, architecture, and music presented in the school curriculum were permeated with Christian religious sym-

bolism. Generally, teachers have taught about religion without worrying too much about it.

The Current Situation

Today, as in the past, including religion in the school curriculum takes many forms. The problem is that some forms may be inappropriate. Some teachers are acquainted with what scholars have written about religious beliefs and practices and use such information when it is relevant to their subject matter; others rely more on their own religious training and their experiences with other denominations or attitudes. Some focus on only familiar religions; others include or even concentrate on more exotic religions. Some teachers, consciously or unconsciously, tend to preach; others are fairly successful at being objective and sensitive to the pluralistic composition of their communities. Some consider religion to include only organized faiths or denominations; others feel that any strongly held and consistent set of values constitutes the religion of a culture, a group, or an individual.

Furthermore, public school teachers have always been expected to encourage, by precept and example, those moral values that are grounded in religious beliefs. Historically, Protestant Christianity and what is now called "civil religion" have dominated such explicit or implicit teaching of religious and moral values. Together, these two strains have been taken for granted as constituting America's faith by those who have not been required to think through the implications of such beliefs.

Things have changed. In 1948 (*McCollum*) the U.S. Supreme Court banned religious classes within the public school building as a part of the curriculum. (In a later case it approved "released-time" classes, allowing students to attend religious instruction during school hours but outside of school.) In 1963 (*Schempp/Murray*) the Court outlawed public-school-sponsored morning devotions. These and other developments have made educators aware (sometimes painfully) that the role of religion in public schools needs some serious rethinking.

Issues to Resolve in Teaching About Religion

Separating Teaching About Religion and Moral Education. One of

the real difficulties in separating teaching about religion from teaching morals is the belief that any discussion about religion must also include moral instruction. After all, are not all public school teachers values educators? Is not the school a government agency established for the specific purpose of socializing young people? If we agree, then we may ask: Are there some generally agreed-on values that teachers should pass on? Those now calling for more civic education believe that teachers need to inculcate the values of justice, equality, and liberty. However, do these ideals mean the same thing to all people? The question every teacher must answer is: Can I be *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive* in my discussion of religion and values? The Supreme Court has said that teachers can teach about religion descriptively. Intellectually, teachers can accept that they are supposed to describe the varieties of religion or explain the richness of various literary modes in sacred scriptures; but emotionally, it is another matter to remain aloof from the religious feelings that the historical events and words of scripture convey.

Teacher Preparation. How much do teachers need to know of the religions about which they teach? Are they conscious of their own biases and aware of the religious background their pupils bring to class? Have methods and materials for teaching about religion been included in their teacher preparation program? Is it possible to teach about religion in a secular school in such a way as to avoid indoctrination in either secularist or religious ideology? In a nearly homogeneous community, need unrepresented denominations and variant attitudes be treated?

Content and Materials for Teaching About Religion. Should teaching about religion be offered as a separate course? If so, should such a course objectively compare various religious beliefs and practices? Should the course try to draw some generalizations about religion as a fairly universal human phenomenon? Should religions be taught experientially? Should pupils visit a variety of religious institutions? Should religious leaders from various denominations be invited to teach part of the course?

What religion content should be included in a course on American civilization or in courses or area studies on Africa, Asia, Latin America, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe? What should be included in courses on Western and Eastern history – ancient, medieval, and mod-

ern? Should students read biblical excerpts and other sacred texts or rely on secondary sources? In either case, who makes the choices and by what criteria?

Community Relations. What should be the relationship between the school and the community (parents, religious spokespersons, others) in matters of teaching about religion? What policies and procedures should be in place so that parents and school patrons can comment on instructional materials and teaching practices? Should the study of major American religions be related to seasonal holidays in the community?

These are some of the questions and issues that administrators, teachers, and the community have to understand and resolve. Some person or group must be responsible for making decisions and providing answers. Educators must be aware of the problems such teaching involves. Professional integrity requires that we face these issues.

Preparing to Teach About Religion

Two questions that need answering as one prepares to teach about religion in the public schools are: Where should religion appear in the curriculum? and What makes a teacher competent in religion studies?

Where Should Religion Appear in the Curriculum?

In 1964 the American Association of School Administrators published *Religion in the Public Schools* in which it is stated:

> A curriculum which ignored religion would itself have serious religious implications. It would seem to proclaim that religion has not been as real in men's lives as health or politics or economics. By omission it would appear to deny that religion has been and is important in man's history -- a denial of the obvious. (p. 56)

The viewpoint expressed above suggests that discussion of religious stories, rituals, events, and imagery could be infused into all areas of the curriculum. In practice, this has not happened. Surveys of religion studies in the public schools since 1963 show that they tend to fall into three areas. The most popular is the "Bible as Literature" course followed by "Comparative Religions" or "Religions of the World." The third most common course or unit deals with the broad area of religion in American history. All these courses are at the secondary level; much less has been done at the elementary level.

Opinions differ as to whether religion studies should be offered as a separate course or integrated into regular courses where appropriate.

Advantages of having a separate course are that teachers are more likely to have special training and are more likely to use specifically designed curriculum materials for such courses. Also, there are likely to be fewer complaints from students or parents, since the course is elective. Nevertheless, the trend is for religion studies to take place in regular courses in English, social studies, music, and art. Many would argue that it is more natural to have it occur this way, since it gives students a sense that religion pervades many aspects of life and is not confined to any one discipline.

What Makes a Teacher Competent to Teach About Religion?

Attributes needed by teachers, especially those who would want to be certified in this field, are discussed in a 1974 document issued by the Public Education Religion Studies Center (PERSC), which reflects a consensus among a number of professionals in religion and education. (According to a survey by Kniker in 1979, eight states had some form of certification for teaching about religion. With one exception, the approved programs were for a teaching minor.) The PERSC document states that the *primary* motivation for teaching about religion should be academic rather than spiritual. In addition to being competent in their subject matter areas and literate about religious phenomena, teachers must be objective in their treatment of religious topics discussed. They must be especially sensitive to the religious pluralism (or nonreligious beliefs) of their students.

The PERSC document identifies four general cognitive competencies for teachers of religion studies: 1) knowledge of religions in all areas of the world from prehistory to the present, 2) knowledge of the methods of studying religion, 3) knowledge of the legal constraints regarding religion studies in public education, and 4) knowledge of teaching methods and curricular materials.

Knowledge of religion includes relevant historical, literary, and sociological data. Teachers, according to the PERSC document, should "possess an adequate knowledge of religion in its formal and informal, institutional and non-institutional, communal and personal, inherited and experienced manifestations." At the college level, such knowledge is gained through courses in Western and Eastern religions. Some argue

that knowledge of the historical development of religion in America is also desirable, as is exposure to religious phenomena from preliterate cultures and from religions of the occult.

Teachers should have some understanding of the various ways that scholars study religion. Using the tools of sociology, anthropology, and history, teachers can help their students see religion as a social phenomenon. Using linguistic analysis and theological statements (where appropriate), teachers can study religions from a hermeneutical or "meaning" perspective. Some scholars of comparative religion focus on similarities and differences based on literature types. By becoming aware of various scholarly approaches to religion, teachers will be better able to help their students discriminate between definitions of religion and theology and between religious and moral systems.

Since public school teachers have "captive audiences," it is essential that they know what is emotionally sound and what is legal regarding religion studies. In addition to knowing about the major court cases, teachers ought to know what the courts meant by the "objective teaching of religion" in the *Schempp/Murray* decisions. They should also be familiar with curriculum materials that are appropriate for the objective teaching of religion.

In addition to knowledge, teachers must have certain skills, including objectivity, effective discussion techniques, and evaluation methods for assessing affective objectives. The key to objective teaching is the use of an interdisciplinary approach and a variety of instructional techniques. Teachers should be familiar with reference sources from a variety of religions and be comfortable using them. Moreover, teachers should be able to work effectively with resource people representing various religious faiths. Being objective requires a willingness to present the range of religious traditions or practices under discussion.

Effective teachers of religion studies also must have interpersonal and intergroup skills that enable them to build rapport and to foster a climate that encourages students to express opinions and exchange ideas. Teachers can use a variety of methods to assess affective outcomes in students. Interviews, panel discussions, and projects are all appropriate methods for such assessment. Remember that students are often interested in seeing the "other side." They are willing to investigate

and report on experiences other than their own and can do so in a variety of creative ways.

Beyond knowledge and skills is the matter of disposition or attitude. Being an effective teacher of religion studies calls for a degree of emotional maturity that goes beyond mere tolerance. To be tolerant implies that teachers allow for, but do not grant, full status to other points of view. What is called for is a true respect for the opinions of others. While teachers may hold their own faith precious, they must accept that religious diversity is a hallmark of a democratic society.

If teachers are serious about their role as searchers for truth, then they have a responsibility to be as fair as they can be in helping students learn how diverse peoples and individuals have interpreted what the truth means.

Resources

Two organizations and one academic study group have provided much of the leadership in curriculum development in the field of religion studies since 1963. The first was the Public Education Religion Studies Center (PERSC) at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. PERSC became a clearinghouse for curriculum and instruction that met constitutional requirements. The second is the National Council on Religion and Public Education (NCRPE), which was formed in 1971 as a consortium of organizations and individuals to support the Supreme Court's 1962 and 1963 decisions, as well as to fulfill the justices' suggestions that religion studies be included in the public school curriculum. A third group, comprised of scholars associated with the American Academy of Religion, formed a study group in the 1970s to examine the philosophical dimensions of teaching about religion in public schools. Of the three groups, only NCRPE remains today, with offices located at the University of Kansas, 1300 Oread, Lawrence, KS 66045. It provides curriculum reviews, sample lessons, and publishes a journal, *Religion & Public Education*.

The Bible in Literature Classes

The Bible is a religious document. Its main character is God, who appears explicitly or implicitly in its stories and poems. Theological and moral teachings in the Bible come from God directly or through the prophets and the apostle Paul. The people who first set down the Bible's words and those who first heard or read them considered them holy. For millions today the book remains sacred. The Bible is also a historical document. It has greatly influenced ancient and modern Western civilization and American culture in particular. However, the primary province of the Bible in the literature class is neither religion nor history. Rather the focus should be on the Bible's literary qualities and on its relation to secular literature.

Focusing on the Bible's literary aspects in the secular public schools of our pluralistic society presents two types of problems. First, teachers must avoid the use of biblical selections to preach theology or morality. Similarly, the teacher must also avoid offending denominational sensibilities, as well as sensibilities of those for whom the Bible is not a sacred document. These complementary caveats are dictated respectively by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution dealing with church-state separation (the establishment clause) and with freedom of belief (the free exercise clause).

Second, a teacher of literature must have some idea of the themes and issues of the biblical passage under study and be prepared to have them arise. It is not enough to help students to appreciate the literary craftsmanship of a biblical passage without reference to its ideas. One

also must examine how well form and content, manner and matter, reinforce each other. Likewise, it is not enough to footnote a piece of secular literature and merely say that it alludes to a certain biblical passage or shares a biblical theme. One must compare the two: Why and how does the secular writer use the biblical allusion? What does the writer do with an issue that also appears in the Bible, even if there is no overt allusion?

It is imperative that literature teachers be aware of and resolve these problems. If a teacher has a religious commitment to evangelize or to see only one true interpretation of a biblical passage, then that teacher should not attempt to use the Bible in public school classes. But when teachers separate their religious convictions from their classroom activities, they submit to a willing temporary suspension of belief because they are concerned that the Bible's influence on our secular literature is often crucial and that biblical illiteracy among our young people is so abysmal and so widespread. Such teachers will prepare themselves by consulting scholarly and community resources, by understanding and being sensitive to religious and nonreligious sensibilities, by using texts — biblical and secular — carefully, by exhibiting and maintaining an atmosphere in the classroom that never permits ridicule, and by choosing an instructional approach that is appropriate to their academic goals.

Approaches to Using the Bible in Literature Classes

The Bible FOR Literature. This approach is most appropriate for elementary school pupils, but the meaning and message of the Bible should be taught by their parents and religious advisers. It is also appropriate for secondary school classes as long as the teacher avoids all discussion of biblical messages. At either level, the purpose is to present Bible stories and some often-quoted passages just to familiarize children with what the book actually says.

In using this approach, the teacher has to choose from an overwhelming wealth of material, depending on the length of the unit or course and the amount of time allowed for related activities. The Hebrew Bible (similar to the Old Testament) offers prehistory (Genesis 1-11), including Creation (both Chs. 1 and 2), Eden, Cain and Abel, Noah (excerpts from Chs. 6-9), and the Tower of Babel; incidents in the

lives of patriarchs and matriarchs, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah; some stories from the Moses epic, of Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Ruth, and Jonah; episodes from the early kings, including Saul, David, and Solomon; and shorter versions of Esther and Daniel (Chs. 2, 3, 5, and 6).

New Testament narratives should stress the life of Jesus: his nativity (Matthew 1:18-2:23 and Luke 1:5-2:39), baptism, crucifixion, and resurrection; and two or three of the best-known miracles or healings. From the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books, shortened versions of the stories of Judith and Susanna would cover the best-known figures.

In addition to narratives, pupils may at this stage be introduced to a few of the most familiar teachings and poems: Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), Psalm 23, Isaiah 2:2-4, Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-10), Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), two or three parables, and Paul's hymn to love (I Corinthians 13:1-13).

As for a text, simple-language versions will do (*Good News Bible*), a paraphrased edition (*Living Bible*), or the King James Version (most often quoted in secular literature but needing glosses for archaisms). The teacher may, of course, choose another version or permit pupils to bring their own Bibles to class. Children's "Tales from the Bible," in the mode of Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare," generally are inappropriate for public schools. They are written primarily for Sunday schools and have at best an interdenominational rather than a nondenominational flavor.

The Bible FOR Literature approach lends itself to pupil projects and contributions from the fine arts, music, and other aspects of our everyday life (for example, advertisements and humorous or political cartoons). All these serve dramatically to reinforce familiarity with Bible stories. At the secondary level this approach may be used for a bit broader and more intensive reinforcement. The teacher may use pieces of secular literature that directly refer to the Bible, thus impelling students to recall one of its stories. Or one might be more adventurous and use the creation and flood stories from heroic epics found in nonbiblical cultures. But teachers must be careful not to make value comparisons between such exotic tales and similar biblical narratives. Equal-

ly important, one must avoid giving the impression that biblical prehistory is just another myth – in the sense of being a quaint story invented to explain origins and other phenomena. Both practices – insisting on the Bible's literal infallibility or demeaning it as just myth – will offend some religious sensibilities. They also will violate the Supreme Court's admonition to study the Bible "objectively as part of a secular program of education" in a pluralistic society.

The Bible AS Literature. Over the past several years biblical scholars and literary critics have produced many analyses of biblical passages by applying literary theories and methodologies just as they would to secular literature. At the moment there is great ferment over this approach to the Bible, resulting in at least a dozen competing schools (many described in Richard N. Soulen's *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*). All this is interesting, even exciting, for the public school teacher who wishes to teach a class in "The Bible as Literature." However, scholarly analyses are usually esoteric resources, not teaching materials. They must be transformed to be useful in lesson plans. This has been done by teachers participating over many years in the Indiana University Institute for Teaching the Bible in Secondary Literature Courses (Contact James S. Ackerman, 203 Sycamore Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405).

One uneven attempt to provide literary analyses of the Bible is a series of booklets titled "Literature of the Bible" (available from Literature of the Bible, Box 27067, Chicago, IL 60627). These booklets should be examined in conjunction with comments on them that appear in *Reviews of Curricular Resource Materials* (available from NCRPE, 1300 Oread, Lawrence, KS 66045). Another resource is Thayer S. Warshaw's *Handbook for Teaching the Bible in Literature Classes* (1978) and also a nine-page mimeographed supplement available from the author (45 Clark Road, Andover, MA 01810). This book is addressed mainly to teaching in secondary schools and introductory college courses. It includes brief teacher-oriented analyses of Genesis 1-3, the Tower of Babel, Psalm 23, I Corinthians 13:1-13, and Proverbs 30:18-19. As an example of biblical literary analysis, we offer the following discussion of parallelism in Proverbs 30:18-19.

Biblical scholars and literary critics have been at pains to identify and

categorize parallelism in Hebrew biblical poetry. What is a classroom teacher to do with such scholarly analyses? Among other things, one might profitably go on to an exercise in writing balanced sentences. Many teachers may feel that, for most of their students, the study of biblical poetic parallelism may be lumped with English prosody as an interesting but irrelevant embellishment to the poem. It is fair to ask, then, what parallelism adds to the poem. How does it enhance the ideas being expressed? What kinds of ideas may a poet express more effectively through parallelism?

One effect of parallelism is to highlight comparisons. As with other kinds of balanced sentences, parallelism helps to dramatize striking analogies among ostensibly dissimilar things or striking contrasts among apparently similar ones. Another effect is to lend force to a statement of cause and result. Therefore, the class might examine how effectively the Bible uses parallelism to express a comparison or some other relationship.

For an example of the artistic use of parallelism to reinforce both a series of analogies and a climactic contrast, consider Proverbs 30:18-19 (RSV):

> Three things are too wonderful for me;
> four I do not understand:
> the way of an eagle in the sky,
> the way of a serpent on a rock,
> the way of a ship on the high seas,
> and the way of a man with a maiden.

The "three-four" device in biblical poetry usually serves only as a reinforcement, to intensify the message (for example, Amos, Chs. 1-2). In the above proverb the device adds an element of comparison. It draws the attention of a close reader both to the similarity of the "four things" and to a difference between the first three and the fourth. At first glance, line 2 is just a slightly altered and reinforcing restatement of line 1. Note, however, that the three things are "too wonderful," whereas with the addition of the fourth there is an inability to "understand."

The speaker can only passively observe the wonders of the world of nature in the sky, on land, at sea. But the speaker is more personally in-

volved when it comes to human nature, so he tries to understand — alas! in vain. Human nature is beyond the world of physical nature. The parallel structure of lines 1 and 2 calls attention to the difference between the speaker's attitudes toward the two worlds.

Continuing, we find that the first two lines are general and abstract, while the next four lines are concrete. In a sense, the last four lines balance the first two, repeating the general thought with specific examples. The effect, again, is to highlight the difference between physical nature and human nature.

Thus we may see a final parallelism of thought, which may be expressed as a proportion: As line 2 is to line 1, so line 6 is to lines 3-5. The three things of line 1 that are too wonderful are the eagle in the air, the serpent on the rock, and the ship on the high seas. As concrete images, they represent all of physical nature. The fourth thing, which in line 2 both prompts and foils the speaker's attempt to understand, is human nature, epitomized by "the way of a man with a maiden" — a startling, climactic image. Is the poem about the gap between the finite human mind and God's infinite and inscrutable world, or is it the result of an individual's unhappy experience with a member of the opposite sex? As an example of the effective use of parallelism, the proverb is perfect.

The Bible IN Literature. Teachers of literature are quite aware of the plethora of biblical quotations, references, images, and allusions in secular literature. Many scholarly essays and books have been devoted to identifying such references. A few are listed below.

Bartel, Roland; Ackerman, James S.; and Warshaw, Thayer S., eds. *Biblical Images in Literature*, Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1975.

Frontein, Raymond-Jean, and Wojcik, Jan, eds. *The David Myth in Literature*. West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1980.

Hone, Ralph E., ed. *The Voice Out of the Whirlwind: The Book of Job*. Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1960.

Trapp, Jacob, ed. *Modern Religious Poems*. New York: Harper & Row, 1964.

Warshaw, Thayer S.; Miller, Betty Lou; and Ackerman, James S., eds. *Bible-Related Curriculum Materials*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1976.

Yohannan, John D., ed. *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife*. New York: New Directions, 1968.

Ziolkowski, Theodore. *Fictional Transfigurations of Jesus*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972.

Christianity and Literature. A periodical from Calvin College Department of English, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Among the more common ways in which the Bible appears in secular literature are:

1. Filling in the Bible story. Some Bible-related secular literature retains the biblical setting, characters, and events, but adds imaginative details (for example, Milton's *Paradise Lost* or T.S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi").

2. Modernizing the Bible story. Some secular literature recreates the Bible story, more or less subtly, in a modern setting, among modern people (for example, Hardy's *Mayor of Casterbridge* or Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*).

3. The crucial biblical allusion. Here the secular piece alludes to the Bible perhaps only once, but at a point where it suddenly illuminates the theme of the entire piece (for example, the title of Sassoon's war poem "Golgotha" or at the turning point of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* when the father admits why he undertook to defend a black man).

4. The Bible as footnote. In a study of *Hamlet*, the teacher might feel called upon to footnote some or all of the biblical allusions (for example, the heinous fratricide of Cain and Claudius, Jephthah's and Polonius' use of their daughters, the players' and Claudius' out-Heroding Herod, Hamlet's final resignation to God's care for the fall of a sparrow, the biblical sin of Gertrude's incestuous sheets). But the teacher should resist the kinds of over-eager symbol hunting that either finds Christ figures in all characters who undergo tribulations and sacrifices or fastens on incidental biblical allusions that might heighten a short passage but are irrelevant to the main theme of the poem, play, or prose piece.

In all these cases the teacher must decide how closely to examine the actual biblical story to which the secular piece alludes. Is Steinbeck's

The Pearl an ironic or straightforward retelling of the parable of the pearl of great price? What has MacLeish done (and said he has done) to the book of Job in his play *J.B.*? If Hemingway's Old Man is a Christ figure, what does it mean to be a Christ figure – at least in that context? Each teacher's decision depends on the classroom situation and the reasons for assigning that piece of literature.

The Bible AND Literature. This approach uses biblical text only when studying literature organized on the basis of genre or theme.

In a unit on poetry one may include a psalm or proverb, an excerpt from Job or the Song of Solomon, the songs of Moses and of Deborah, passages from Ecclesiastes or Isaiah, the Beatitudes, and Paul's poem on love. A short story unit could include Jonah, Ruth, and tales from Samson and Deborah. Novellas and heroic epics may include narratives from Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, and Jesus. With adaptation and cutting, Job and the Song of Solomon become dramatic readings for several voices (some are on records; Job is done well in an Encyclopaedia Britannica film). Tragedy is often considered a genre. Here we have the story of Saul, as well as the final disappointment of Moses. One scholar has written a book in which he argues that the Book of Mark fulfills the Aristotelian criteria for comedy. Northrup Frye finds his own schema of genres fully represented in the Bible. Mary Ellen Chase calls the story of Judith a romance. Parables and epigrams from the Bible easily fit with secular examples of these genres.

Many teachers of literature organize their reading assignments about a theme, preferably one that speaks to young people. Immediately, one thinks of the many instances of sibling rivalry in the Hebrew Bible as well as in the story of the Prodigal Son. Growth through a crisis resulting in a change of character and values is exhibited in Jacob's wrestling, Joseph's meeting with his brothers, Moses at the burning bush, David's many stages of development, Jesus' baptism, and Paul's ride to Damascus. Chapters 1-2 of Genesis raise questions of pattern and novelty, of orderliness and creativity. Adam and Eve fit into many themes: the fall from innocence, sexual awareness, disobedience and punishment, consciousness of guilt, and nostalgia for a lost golden age and the quest for a new one. A unit on women may well include stories of Deborah and Jael, Ruth, and excerpted versions of Esther, Judith,

and Susanna. If the theme is social justice, parts of Amos, Hosea, and Micah are relevant. A focus on ethnic prejudice may include stories of Jonah, Ruth, Esther, and the Good Samaritan. In fact, the Bible has a well-wrought story or bit of teaching for nearly every human experience, [illegible]ne, or value.

Theme and genre often overlap and some cases protrude from any typology. A unit on mythology often follows such threads as the creation of the world or of species, a lost golden age, and a universal flood. Of course, these find their counterparts in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Science fiction often examines the possible end of the world in an apocalyptic nuclear war, evil monsters that threaten civilization, and the vision of a brave new world. These elements are present in Revelation/Apocalypse, the Bible's last book.

Some Classroom Problems

Warshaw's *Handbook for Teaching the Bible in Literature Classes* and its mimeographed supplement discuss some 60 specific problems that a teacher of literature may face in using biblical passages as texts. Space limitations of this fastback make it impossible to list all the problems, much less discuss them, so let us merely raise a few provocative questions: How does one handle student questions about supernatural, miraculous events? What is the relation between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament? What are the differences among the Jewish Bible, the Protestant Old Testament, the Catholic Old Testament, the Eastern Orthodox Old Testament, and Bibles of other Christian denominations? What is the correct numbering of the Ten Commandments? Should clergy help teach the class in school or on visits to various churches? How does one prepare pupils to approach the Bible in a literature class by way of background and ground rules? How does one choose a classroom text, both biblical and Bible-related?

The sample questions listed above indicate that using the Bible calls for thoughtful preparation. The book need not be handled with fear and trembling, but it should be treated with respect for the differing attitudes toward it in our society. Its use calls for a series of commitments: to religious pluralism in secular public schools, to sensitivity toward a

multitude of sensibilities, and to a professional responsibility to become acquainted with both the Bible's text and its scholarly resources – its literal meaning and its many religious interpretations.

The Bible should be taught in public schools to remedy the rampant illiteracy about one of the most important pieces of literature in our culture. More important, it should be taught appropriately.

Teaching About Religion in the Social Studies

Perhaps the most compelling argument for teaching about religions in the social studies is simply to review the role of religions in current world situations. For example, the overthrow of the Shah of Iran was predicted by those who understood the nature of Islamic fundamentalism. Because of his wealth and position, the Shah had many obligations to his people; and in the minds of Iranian activists, he had not fulfilled his duty according to Islamic law. One cannot comprehend events in Poland's political life today apart from an understanding of that nation's fidelity to the Roman Catholic Church. Modern Israel's involvement in the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East can only be understood in the context of its historical religious attachments to a Jewish homeland. Religion continues to fuel conflict in Northern Ireland. Familiarity with Hindu beliefs, and their diversity and local variations, is essential to understanding the lifestyle and political relationships in India. Land reform efforts and guerilla warfare in Central America have their ideological base in "liberation theology" advocated by activist priests and members of other church groups.

In addition to current events at the international level, religion has been and continues to be an important theme in American culture. One need only glance casually across the cultural landscape to see the impact of religion. City names such as St. Paul, Los Angeles, and San Antonio; street names such as St. Peter Avenue; bumper stickers; gospel music; holidays; greeting cards; symbols, jewelry, art, foods; "In God We Trust" on our currency – all point to the significant role religion plays in our culture.

The emergence of the Moral Majority, the electronic church, the "born again" movement, and the abortion issue in the 1984 presidential campaign have made many Americans realize that religion and politics do mix. The growth of cults and their youth recruitment methods have raised tough legal and ethical questions for families that attempt to have their children "deprogrammed."

The United States is a nation of immigrants who, along with Native Americans, bring a blend of religion and ethnicity to the American "experience." These immigrant groups cannot be understood apart from their religious history. Blacks, German Lutherans, Ukranian Catholics, Russian Orthodox, and Polish Catholics are only a few examples of the religio-ethnic groups in the United States. As new peoples continue to immigrate to the United States each year, they bring their religious identities as a part of their cultural heritage. The most recent are the Southeast Asians, whose Buddhist faith may be taking root here, continuing a tradition of religious freedom already experienced by Mennonites, Jews, Quakers, and Lutherans, to name just a few.

Historically, America has become a cultural mosaic in which each group contributes to the beauty of the total picture without loss of its unique qualities or character. Any real understanding of the American cultural mosaic is incomplete without serious attention to the religious pluralism of that mosaic. Yet, instruction about religion in history, the social studies, and multicultural education has been a limited effort. Too often schools restrict discussion of religion to when a local or national incident suggests it is needed. This approach to studying about religion may be ineffective because the situation is emotionally charged, appropriate materials are lacking, and it is difficult to present a reasoned perspective on the issue. Even when teaching about religions occurs on a more systematic basis, the sources used may be limited to a few paragraphs in a textbook, which may be inaccurate, limited, or distorted. In many schools no attention is paid to religion at all because teachers lack preparation and instructional materials, or they feel the topic is "just too hot to handle."

Social studies teachers have an obligation to help students understand the role of religion in various cultures throughout history. This would include the impact of religion on historic events and the influence

of religion on law, art, music, and literature, as well as traditional religious topics taught in history courses such as the Crusades and the Reformation. Also, students should learn about religious freedom, how it has developed through the years, and how it must be safeguarded in a democratic, pluralistic society.

Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in the Social Studies

Teaching about religions in the social studies is a challenging opportunity, given the sensitive and emotionally charged nature of its content and the legal restraints on what can and cannot be done. The following guidelines provide a sense of direction and identify trouble spots that can be avoided.

1. Foremost is the commitment to teach and learn *about* religions and not to teach religion. The course should not be a religion course but a social studies course about religions.

2. Classroom discussions and activities must be conducted in an environment that is free of advocacy. While various religious points of view may be explored, no religious point of view, including antireligiosity or areligiosity, should be advocated. Avoid making comparisons between religions, that is, religion A is better than religion B. The religious affiliation or non-affiliation of students, teachers, or anyone, is a matter of individual choice in a democracy.

3. The question often arises as to whether or not teachers should express their own points of view on religions or religion-related matters. The National Council for the Social Studies suggests that "the teacher should not impose personal views on the students, but by teaching and allowing them to be critical of all sources of information, the teacher may state personal conclusions when appropriate."

4. The classroom is not to be a marketplace in which students are encouraged to "shop around" for a religious identification or nonidentification.

5. The teacher's role should be that of a facilitator of discussion and inquiry. The environment should be conducive to permitting students to explore ideas and views in a nonjudgmental and nonthreatening manner. Teachers must be sensitive to nonverbal messages that may be conveyed by themselves or by students.

6. The teacher needs to make students aware that there is wide diversity of opinions among so-called religious experts. A concerted effort needs to be made to use examples from various points of view.

7. No student should be asked to participate in any activity that violates his or her sensitivities or conscience. Such activities might include role-playing religious ceremonies, attending services at a local place of worship, or going on field trips.

8. While an experience-centered curriculum is desirable, caution must be taken to ensure that students are not unwittingly coerced into practicing religion as part of the learning experiences, for example, being made to sing religious music while visiting a service.

9. Teachers must earn the confidence and support of students, other teachers, the administration, parents, and the community, including religious leaders, by establishing a clear understanding of the goals of the program and its activities. Keep the lines of communication open; do not assume that others know what is happening in the religion studies area.

10. Religious professionals (clergy) in the community can be, and ought to be, a valuable resource; but remember that they have commitments to their own faith. Moreover, to open a classroom to one is to open it to all. Use religious professionals for highly specific tasks: to answer questions raised in a class discussion, to explain their religious culture "on their own turf" during a field trip, and so forth. When the goals of the course are clearly communicated, religious professionals generally are most supportive.

11. Teaching about religion must be presented within a historical and cultural context. For example, the advent of movable type made the Bible more accessible.

12. The teacher should not try to do too much. It is virtually impossible to study *all* aspects of *all* religions. Efforts should be made to maintain some balance between religious traditions of the East and the West. The goal is to develop interest, curiosity, respect, and appreciation rather than comprehensive knowledge of all religions in the world.

13. Do not overemphasize the bizarre and unusual. To focus on exotic beliefs or to dramatize strange practices and customs may be interesting to students, but it is likely to violate the integrity of the

religious tradition under study. The guiding question should be: Is this activity increasing knowledge about and respect for other people and their ways?

A Sample Lesson: "Religious Expression in Your Community"

The following lesson is presented to illustrate how a social studies teacher might introduce students to a unit on religion. The lesson is adapted from one of several that appears in *Religion in Human Culture* (1978), developed by the World Religions Curriculum Development Center and published by Argus Communications, One DLM Park, Box 7000, Allen, Texas 75002. The adaption has been done with the permission of the publisher.

Lesson Objectives

1. Students will demonstrate an awareness of the diversity of forms of religious expression in their community.
2. Students will demonstrate objectivity toward the variety of religious expressions suggested by classmates.

Teaching Procedures

1. Students are given a mimeographed handout with a numbered column on the left and a large blank square, which they will use to make a rough map of their community.
2. Students are told to place a dot on the map to indicate the location of their home and to think of every item of religious expression in their community they can perceive and to write it in the column on the left. They then locate each item on the map in its approximate spot by writing its number from the listing.
3. Using the chalkboard or newsprint, the teacher compiles a master list of items of religious expression by having students share what they have recorded on their mimeographed worksheets. The list might include such diverse examples as architecture, art, music, holiday symbols, radio and TV shows, bumper stickers, missions, cemeteries, hospitals, grafitti, billboards, sidewalk preachers, etc.
4. Since the purpose of the lesson is to get students to think about

the variety and extensiveness of religious expression in their community, it is important for the teacher to record every idea submitted. Neither the teacher nor the students should make subjective evaluations of items on the master list since the purpose is to identify what constitutes religious expressions in the eyes of *some* people.

5. Continue the discussion by asking students to think of other kinds of religious expressions that might be found in other communities or in other parts of the world.

Homework or Follow-up Activities

1. Ask students to look around their neighborhoods for additional examples of religious expression. This could be a small-group activity for students who live in the same neighborhood.

2. Ask students to write a report on their findings indicating those items of religious expression they expected to find and those that surprised them.

3. As a bulletin board project the class can make a large master map of the community on which are identified all the examples of religious expression found.

4. Individual or small-group projects might include making a collage or preparing a slide show of religious expression in the community.

A simple introductory lesson such as this helps set the stage for further study on learning about religion in a pluralistic society.

Curriculum Resources for the Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies

3501 Newark St. N.W., Washington, DC 20016

In particular, see "Standards for Social Studies Teachers," *NCSS Position Statement*, 1971, p. 8; and "Teaching About Religion: Vista's Unlimited," *Social Education* 45 (January 1981).

World Religions Curriculum Development Center

6425 West 33rd St., St. Louis Park, MN 55426

WRCDC has developed, field tested, and published printed and audiovisual materials for teaching about world religions at the secondary level and above.

Religion-Social Studies Curriculum Project

Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306

The project developed materials for studying religious issues in American history, Western civilization, and world history classes at the secondary level. Addison-Wesley of Menlo Park, Calif., is the publisher.

Indiana Religion Studies Project

203 Sycamore Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN 47405

Operated under the sponsorship of the Lilly Endowment, Inc., the project includes summer workshops for teachers. Sample lessons, available while supplies last, cover U.S. and world religious groups and phenomena.

The National Council on Religion and Public Education

1300 Oread Avenue, Lawrence, KS 66045

NCRPE is a clearinghouse for all materials produced for teaching about religions. In addition to reviews of curriculum sets, NCRPE can send sample lessons for elementary and secondary classrooms.

Film Sources

The following companies have produced 16mm films about world religions and other topics useful in learning about religions:

Doubleday Multimedia, P. O. Box 11607, Santa Anna, CA 92705.

Julien Bryan Films, International Film Foundation, Suite 916, 475 ... Ave., New York, NY 10017.

McGraw-Hill Films, 330 W. 42nd St., New York, NY 10036.

NBC Educational Enterprises, Thirty Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020.

Filmstrip Sources

The following companies have produced slides and filmstrips on world religions and related materials:

Argus Communications, One DLM Park, P.O. Box 7000, Allen, TX 75002.

Sheik Publications, 5 Beekman St., New York, NY 10038.

Center for Humanities, Two Holland Avenue, White Plains, NY 10603.

Time-Life, Box 834, Radio City Post Office, New York, NY 10019.

Community Relations and Teaching About Religion

Introducing the study about religion into the curriculum is a delicate and sometimes volatile undertaking. It requires both sensitive cultivation of community support and informed cooperation of the education establishment. Consider what has happened in three communities in recent years.

Sioux Falls, South Dakota, had a long tradition of Christmas assemblies. In 1977 the parents of Roger Florey complained that their son had been required to participate (against his family's religious convictions) in the exercises that included learning and repeating Christian answers to a so-called "basic Christmas quiz." The Floreys and others later contended that a new policy adopted by the school board (dealing with treatment of religion in holiday observance programs, as well as in the curriculum, and at dedications and commencement excerises) did not rectify the issue. The resulting suit argued that the policies of the district violated both the establishment and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment. Eventually, a federal district court ruled (and was upheld on appeal) that the new school board policy guidelines, "if properly administered and narrowly construed, would not run afoul of the First Amendment."

While the Florey case was in progress, the superintendent of schools in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, issued a directive to district principals urging that treatment of holiday observances in the school be done with "sensitivity" toward the beliefs of religious minorities. What was meant as prudent counsel, however, was quickly attacked by an ad hoc group calling itself "Christian Parents for Heritage Preservation." Their peti-

tion to the school board, ultimately signed by 20,000 citizens, stated: "We, the undersigned, do hereby protest the removal of any reference to Jesus in our celebration of our Christian holidays in the Public Schools of Linn County. . . . [We] therefore, can no longer sit idly by and let the minority rule our school system." As in Sioux Falls, the school board appointed a citizen group to draft a policy statement; but there was no lawsuit in Cedar Rapids.

In the mid-1970s parents in Tulsa, Oklahoma, increasingly objected to elementary school Christmas plays with a strong religious motif. They felt such plays isolated their children who did not wish to participate in them and derogated their religious tradition because of the nature of the script used. Tulsa already had in place a written policy by which materials used in the schools could be questioned. If the problem was not resolved at the individual school level, a districtwide committee representing administrators, teachers, central office personnel, and the community through the PTA, was activated. This committee had proved very effective at resolving other problems, so the process began to be used when materials of a religious nature for holiday observances came under question.

At the same time, protesting parents went to the local clergy association to solicit their support. A representative community group then approached the superintendent about the problem. A series of exploratory meetings were held between the superintendent and several of his staff and the protesting parents and clergy. As a result, a task force was appointed by the superintendent, the clergy association, the protesting parents, the school board, and the PTA. In order to broaden the spectrum of viewpoints, lay and clerical representatives of more fundamentalist positions were invited to participate. The final group represented all positions in the community, from an atheist student to those who believed the schools should assume responsibility for children's religious education.

After many months of meeting, guidelines were developed which tried to set a tone and spirit to accommodate the multitude of religious differences in the school population. These guidelines were constitutionally appropriate and were worded so that students of all religions could feel that the schools respected their beliefs. Meetings were held at

which the guidelines were explained to principals, who were then to hold similar meetings with their staffs. The news media had been present at task force sessions so its work was widely reported. Community attitudes were vented through "Letter-to-the-Editor" columns.

The guidelines were not adopted as official board policy because the board felt that policy already existed that supported respect for varying student differences. Rather, the guidelines were viewed as an administrative implementation of that policy.

These three cases make it clear that we cannot escape the fact that controversy can and does surround the treatment of religion in public schools, including the commonplace practice of conducting activities to celebrate the traditional Christian holidays. Some important lessons have been learned through these struggles that can be shared with other districts. Foremost of these is that broad community involvement appears to be worth the effort and time taken. In all of the cases cited, community involvement resulted in policy statements, which are paying excellent dividends.

To Act or Not to Act: That Is the Question!

Local school policies with respect to how religion is handled typically fall into three categories: the ostrich approach, the crisis approach, and the constructive approach.

The Ostrich Approach. Sometimes, in communities that are largely homogeneous in religious preference, the thinking runs, "There's no problem here, so why change?" or "We've always done things this way!" The classic administrative ploy is, "When in doubt, leave it out." Although devotional exercises in public school classrooms have been unconstitutional since 1963, in some school districts prayer and "inspirational" Bible reading are daily occurrences. Usually only one religious tradition is given any significant attention. Such an approach not only represents poor citizenship in that it disregards the Constitution, but it also results in an ethnocentric education.

The Crisis Approach. Some "ostrich approach" school districts have been catapulted into change because of some crisis. A new family with a minority religious affiliation moves into the community, and the parents object to their child's subjection to the display of a Christmas star,

magi, camels, a manger scene, or even a decorated tree by the well-intentioned teacher. Or a student decides to form a Bible-study group of fundamentalist persuasion and requests to hold meetings at the high school. Parents, hearing of this development, visit the principal and threaten legal action if the group is allowed to use the building. Both "conservatives" and "liberals" on such an issue may ask their state affiliates of the American Civil Liberties Union to fight for their side (such has been the case with the distribution of so-called religious newspapers in schools). Both groups are using the First Amendment to justify their positions.

Without a policy to guide them, administrators may try to do nothing, to intimidate the objectors into acceptance of majority views, or to institute rapid change. Instituting rapid change is a crisis approach that offers little time for consideration of alternatives, little opportunity for consistent decision making, and often only precipitous action. Sometimes the result has been a decision to remove any mention of religion from all parts of the school program, including its legitimate study.

The Constructive Approach. This is the best approach and it includes several steps: becoming aware of current U.S. Supreme Court decisions regarding the treatment of religion in the public schools, learning what other school districts of comparable size and composition have done, taking an inventory to determine what religion-related activities are going on in one's own school system, soliciting counsel and recommendations from a broad spectrum of the local community, instituting procedures for public involvement, and developing a comprehensive policy statement and guidelines to clarify the school district's philosophy. When these steps are taken, the result is both good public relations for the school system and good education for the students. Let us elaborate on these steps.

The 16,000 school districts in the U.S. have a unique privilege. They can, with relatively little state or federal intervention, design their own education policies. That privilege has a concommitant responsibility to develop policies that are consistent with the Supreme Court's interpretation of our Constitution.

The policy statement on religion should reflect familiarity with U.S.

Supreme Court decisions affecting religion and the schools, should be educationally sound, sensitive to the various groups in our pluralistic society, and general enough to allow for situational application by principals and teachers. Once developed, the policy statement should be broadly circulated in order to create better understanding among the general public. Procedures for correcting abuses of the policy should be clearly spelled out.

Components of Policy Statements

Our study of school district policy statements indicate that they include most, if not all, of the following components:

1. *Importance of study about religion in good education.* Some discussion should be presented on the critical role of religion in human culture and on its importance for a balanced understanding of civilization and society.

2. *Legal parameters for the treatment of religion in the curriculum.* It is essential that a clear distinction be made between the academic study of religion and religious indoctrination and devotional practices. Also, there should be some summary of Supreme Court decisions that clarify whether a particular activity falls within constitutional boundaries, specifically the three-part test set forth in *Lemon* v. *Kurtzman*: first, the activity must have a secular purpose (in this case, education); second, the principal or primary effect of the activity must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion (the principle of "benevolent neutrality" toward religion); third, the activity avoids excessive governmental entanglement with religion (the dictation of policy by government/school officials regarding matters of religious practice).

3. *Points at which study about religion may be found within the school program.* These are the curriculum areas in which the topic of religion is often included (social studies, literature); courses specifically designed for study about religion (Religions of the World, the Bible as Literature); and the arts (music with religious content, art with religious iconography, etc.).

4. *Use of community resources/personnel for instructional pur-*

poses. This component should clarify how and when local clergy or other qualified laypersons may be involved as resource persons in class instruction.

5. *Participation of school groups in community religious activities.* Guidelines should be established for school choir and band performance as part of community worship services, for example, a communitywide Easter sunrise service.

6. *Observance of religious holidays.* There should be clarification of which civil holidays are to be reflected in school activities; what such recognition means in terms of program (whether religious music, symbolism, or readings are to be used); and efforts to include treatment of non-Christian religious holiday traditions.

7. *Provision for excuse without penalty for students from participation in activities involving religion.* Having such a provision guarantees the right of nonparticipation in the performance of drama, music, or dance whose content would be personally offensive and should allow alternative activities to be pursued. Provision should also be made for excusing students from patriotic observances that violate their religious beliefs. In addition, there should be provision for excuse without penalty for both students and faculty for attendance at major holiday worship services. This provision allows faculty to observe their religion without loss of salary and students to do so without lowering their grades as long as they make up classwork and tests.

8. *Use of school facilities by groups with religious orientation.* This issue is less controversial now since the U.S. Congress passed legislation in 1984 allowing bona fide student groups with predominantly religious concerns to use school facilities for meetings before or after school. No doubt additional court decisions will be necessary to refine what criteria will determine when one group is allowed the use of school facilities while another is denied. In a related area, school board policy ought to decide if non-student religious groups will be allowed to rent or otherwise make use of school facilities.

9. *Baccalaureate services, commencements, and other ceremonial occasions.* The policy should clarify the school district's position on the sponsorship and location of baccalaureate services if they are predominantly religious in nature; also whether invocations and

benedictions are appropriate at commencements or other ceremonial occasions.

10. *Provision for grievance procedures.* There should be clearly specified procedures and appeal channels for filing complaints regarding alleged constitutional violations in school practices involving religion.

Involving the Community in Policy Making

Although the initial impetus to undertake the academic study of religion in the schools may come from a teacher or group of teachers, the actual policy making is the responsibility of the local school board. The school board often delegates to the superintendent the responsibility for appointment of a citizens' committee to conduct a study and formulate policy guidelines on the basis of the study. If such a committee is to be effective, it should be given secretarial and logistical support by the district. Experience suggests that such citizens' committees should be broadly representative of the many publics in the community. While large committees can become unwieldy, it is probably better to err on the side of including more people.

The policy-making committee should undertake at least three major tasks: gathering information, developing a report and policy guidelines, and interpreting the policy guidelines to the school board and larger community. The information-gathering stage might consist of briefings by experts on the history of religion in the schools of this nation and on decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court pertaining to religion in public education. Information gathering might also include securing relevant policy statements from school districts of comparable size, as well as from the American Civil Liberties Union, National PTA, selected court documents, the American Jewish Congress, and the national offices of major religious bodies – all of whom participated in the Supreme Court cases.

In addition, the committee may wish to consider interviewing groups of citizens in the larger community. Such a procedure not only helps ensure heightened sensitivity to a broad spectrum of community opinion but also serves to blunt any citizen's charges that the policy finally adopted did not consider community views. The committee can use the

interview sessions as opportunities to interpret its task and to answer questions.

Giving some organization to all the input from the information-gathering stage will require some skilled editorial work. The written guidelines ought to be general enough to allow for flexibility in interpretation, yet specific enough to encourage consistency. The committee should acknowledge that experience will inevitably lead to subsequent modifications and rewriting. The completed document is, of course, delivered to the school board for its consideration prior to adoption.

The school board is well-advised to schedule a couple of open hearings about the policy statement. Such a forum provides opportunity for the board to interpret it to the larger community and to receive a preliminary assessment of potential public response. In addition, release of the policy statement to the media ensures its broad distribution.

Implementation

Once the school board has adopted the policy statement, the next task is implementation. The superintendent will want to hold meetings with all administrators in the district to review the new policy statement, respond to questions, and offer suggestions for implementation. The administrators, in turn, will review the policy statement with their respective faculties. Special meetings may be necessary for music teachers because of the sensitive issue of performing religious music.

Administrators, in monitoring the implementation of the policy guidelines, should ensure that a balanced treatment is accorded; that is, attention in instruction should be given to Eastern as well as Western religious traditions and holiday observances, which could pose problems for teachers not familiar with traditions other than the Judeo-Christian. This underscores the need for inservice opportunities for the instructional staff.

The preceding suggestions, based on actual experiences of school systems, are intended as a way of developing sound guidelines for the integration of religion studies into public school curricula and of fostering good community relations in the process. The successful achievement of this dual goal might be summarized as follows: dispelling ignorance with

information, overcoming suspicion by open communication, offsetting bias through wide consultation, and minimizing confusion by planned implementation. The winners will be our children. Learning about religious differences is part of our education that will enhance, not impede, our nation's motto: *e pluribus unum*.

Resources

1. Space does not permit the reprinting of specific school policy statements. For copies of selected school statements, contact the National Council on Religion and Public Education, 1300 Oread, Lawrence, KS 66045.

2. A particularly thorough statement developed at the state level (Minnesota) can be purchased from: Minnesota State Department of Education, Capitol Square, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN 55101.

3. The American Association of School Administrators' publication, *Religion in the Public Schools* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), provides a helpful overview of the items that might be included in a district's policy statement.

4. The National Conference of Christians and Jews, 71 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003, publishes "A Calendar of Religious and Ethnic Festivals." Unesco has a similar calendar.

5. To gain the latest information on U.S. Supreme Court decisions, call or write the U.S. Supreme Court Public Information Office, One First St. N.E., Washington, DC. Phone: (202) 252-3211.

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